

**What is 'widening participation'?**

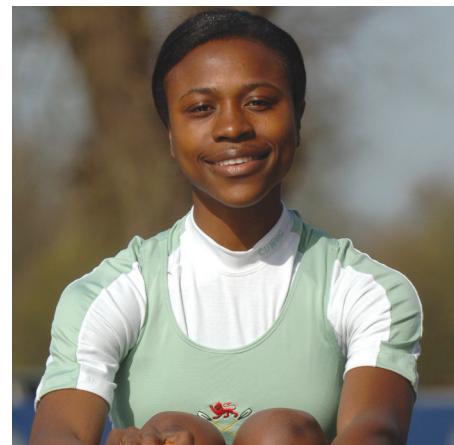
Widening participation is a generic term for work undertaken to encourage currently under-represented groups to apply to and succeed in higher education.

Which groups are under-represented at Cambridge?

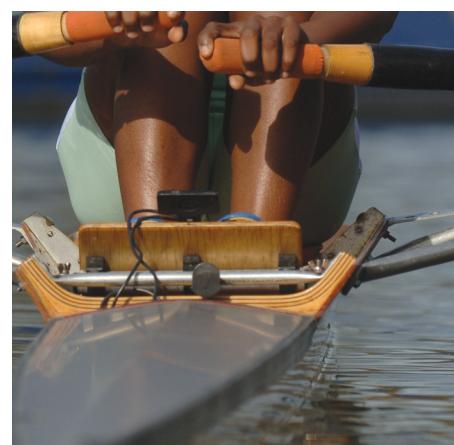
The same groups that are under-represented at many other universities: those from the lowest socioeconomic groups. We also work to encourage applications from the state sector, students from further education colleges, students from certain ethnic minority backgrounds and mature students.

When did Cambridge start widening participation?

Cambridge has reached out to scholars since its creation 800 years ago. We have always encouraged applications from under-represented groups – long before the government's formalised programmes to widen access to a university education.

**Why is Cambridge investing in widening participation?**

The University of Cambridge is looking for the best students and we know that they come from all backgrounds. We want to help schools raise aspirations and encourage students who are academically gifted.



Questions and Answers

What are the challenges in widening participation?

Inaccurate perceptions of Cambridge remain a barrier, as do misunderstandings about the Cambridge application process and the qualifications required. Identifying disadvantaged students with the potential to succeed at the University of Cambridge can also be a challenge.

What about cost? Isn't studying at Cambridge more expensive?

No. Like many other universities, Cambridge will be charging UK/EU students tuition fees of £9,000 per year, which can be covered by a loan and therefore, is not payable up front. College accommodation throughout the degree course and an extensive bursary scheme mean that studying at Cambridge is often less expensive than other universities.

How does Cambridge dispel myths and encourage applications?

The most effective way to change attitudes is for pupils, mature students and teachers to experience Cambridge first hand. Our widening participation initiatives include more than 100 University and College open days, taster days, events for teachers and higher education advisors; free residential subject-specific summer schools; visits to schools; and Oxford and Cambridge Student Conferences held around the country.

Who runs your widening participation activities?

Cambridge Admissions Office has a team dedicated to widening participation and organising a huge range of events and activities. Colleges are also linked with local authorities in designated areas of the country and staff host visits by groups of pupils and give talks in schools. Cambridge University Students' Union runs initiatives including a shadowing scheme to enable prospective applicants to meet current students. Many schemes are run in conjunction with outside organisations, such as the Sutton Trust.

How many people take part in these initiatives each year?

In 2009/10 some 157,000 pupils and teachers took part in face-to-face widening participation activities across the country and in Cambridge.

Isn't the application and interview process very complicated and confusing?

Recent changes have been made: the separate Cambridge application form and fee have been abolished and the application process is now the same as for other UK universities. Our interviewers are trained to make applicants feel at ease: the substance of the responses given, not the style of delivery, is what matters.

Do 'disadvantaged' applicants get special consideration?

The Cambridge Special Access Scheme allows schools to indicate whether applicants come from a family with no record of higher education, or if their home life or education has been significantly disrupted. Such applicants need to demonstrate the same academic potential as other applicants.

Are all these initiatives making a difference?

Yes. The proportion of state-educated students rose from 50 per cent in 1996 to 59 per cent in 2010; black and minority ethnic students grew from 6 per cent in 1990 to 15 per cent in 2010.

Does widening participation lower academic standards?

No. There has been no lowering of academic expectations for courses and no fall in degree results. Our commitment to excellence is borne out by Cambridge's continued high ranking in university league tables.

What next?

Progress is encouraging, but more remains to be done. Generous donations are allowing much needed investment in further Cambridge access initiatives, including the expansion of the Widening Participation team within the Cambridge Admissions Office.

Further information on widening participation initiatives at Cambridge

Jon Beard is Director of Undergraduate Recruitment. Tom Levinson is Head of Widening Participation.

Contact: Cambridge Admissions Office, admissions@cam.ac.uk; tel: 01223 333308; website: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate

Cambridge University Students' Union runs a range of access initiatives. Contact: access@cusu.cam.ac.uk; tel: 01223 335654; website: www.cusu.cam.ac.uk/prospective/

To find out more about open days, applications and financial support, information for teachers and advisors, and College area links: www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate